

# National Resources Inventory

## 2001 Annual NRI

### Land Use

July 2003

#### About the Data

Estimates presented here are based upon the latest information from the National Resources Inventory (NRI). The NRI is a longitudinal sample survey based upon scientific statistical principles and procedures. It is conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), in cooperation with Iowa State University's Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology.

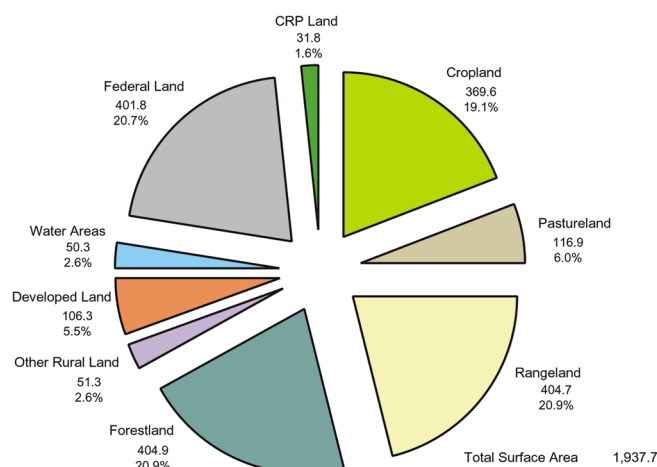
The results are the first available from the new Annual NRI. Previously, NRI data were collected at 800,000 sample sites every 5 years. Now the data are collected every year, but for slightly less than 25 percent of these same sample sites. The 2001 data are suitable only for analysis at a national scale because of this reduced sample size. As additional data are collected each year, (over)

*The National Resources Inventory (NRI) is a statistical survey of natural resource conditions and trends on nonfederal land in the United States - nonfederal lands include privately owned lands, tribal and trust lands, and lands controlled by State and local governments. The NRI provides nationally consistent statistical data on how these lands are used and on changes in land use patterns for the period 1982 – 2001. To assess conservation issues on nonfederal rural lands, this land use information must be analyzed in conjunction with the other NRI data elements. Land uses of particular interest are those that are used in the production of agricultural and timber products that are the foundation of our Nation's agricultural economy.*

#### Key Findings

- The contiguous 48 states cover nearly 1.9 billion acres.
- The majority of this area (74 percent) is in nonfederal, rural land uses - nearly 1.4 billion acres, which is composed of rangeland, forest land, cropland, pastureland, other rural land, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land.
- A subset of these lands is defined as prime farmland - those lands with the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, fiber, and oilseeds and that is also available for these uses. In 2001, there were about 330 million acres of prime farmland in the contiguous United States.

U.S. Total Surface Area, by Land Cover/Use, 2001,  
Excluding Alaska, Hawaii, and Caribbean Area  
(Millions of Acres and Percent of Total Surface Area)



## About the Data, cont.

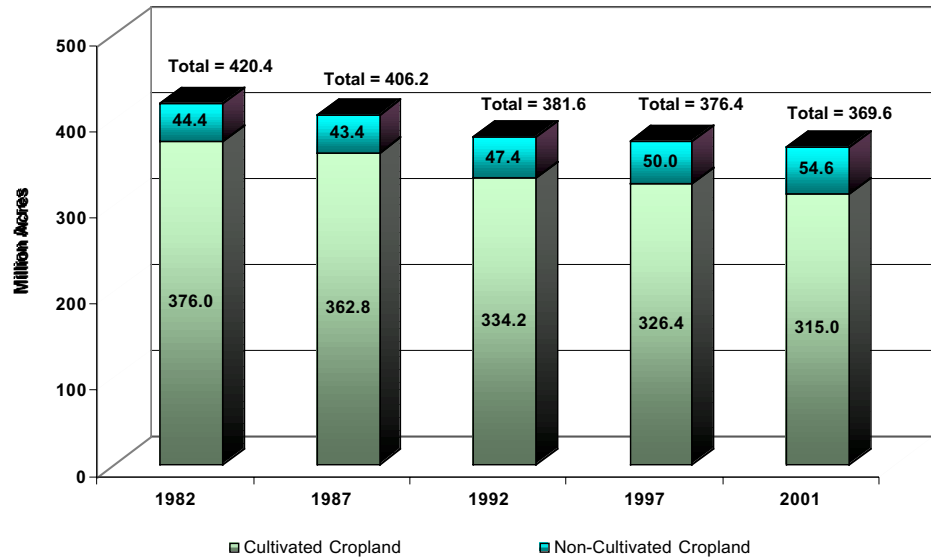
results will become available for regional, state, and sub-state analysis. Current estimates cover the contiguous 48 states. Future estimates will also cover Hawaii, Alaska, the Caribbean, and selected Pacific Basin islands.

The findings on land use come from the NRI data category “Land Cover/Use,” which comprises mutually exclusive categories such as cropland, rangeland, forest land, other rural land, developed land, and water areas. The NRI uses this classification to account for each and every acre of nonfederal land within the Nation. Every parcel of land is described by one and only one of these categories.

The NRI approach to conducting inventories facilitates examining trends in rural and developed land uses over time because –

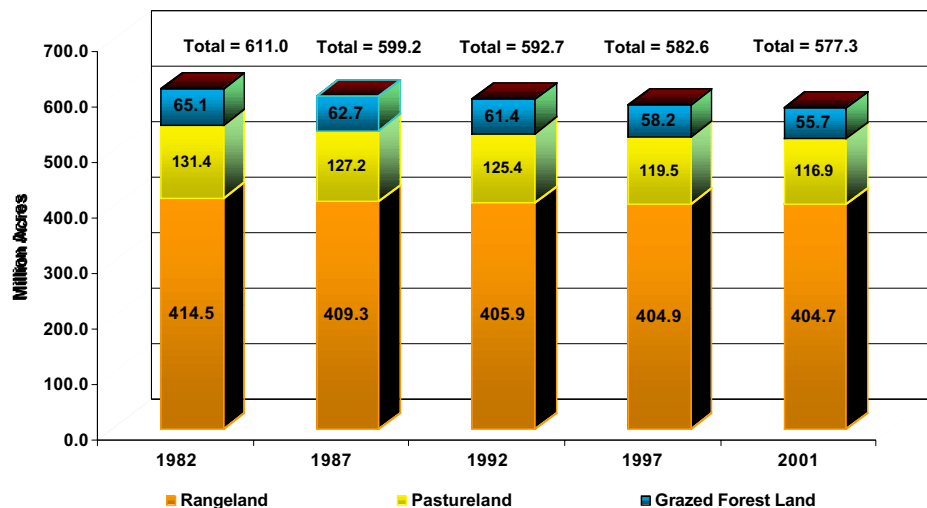
- the same sample sites have been studied since 1982, *(over)*

**Cropland, 1982-2001**



- The Nation’s cropland acreage declined from 420 million acres in 1982 to 370 million acres in 2001, a decrease of about 12 percent. The net decline between 1997 and 2001 was nearly 7 million acres, or 2 percent.
- The percentage of total cropland that is noncultivated has continued to increase since 1987. Noncultivated cropland accounted for 15 percent (55 million acres) of cropland acreage in 2001, up from 11 percent (43 million acres) in 1987.
- Between 1982 and 2001, nonfederal acreage devoted to grazing uses - rangeland, pastureland, and grazed forest land - declined from 611 million acres in 1982 to 577 million acres in 2001, a decrease of almost 6 percent. Between 1997 and 2001, the net decline in grazing land acreage was less than 1 percent.

**Grazing Land, 1982 - 2001**



### About the Data, cont.

- the same data have been collected since 1982 [definitions and protocols have remained the same],
- the inventory accounts for 100 percent of the surface area,
- quality assurance and statistical procedures are designed/developed to ensure that trend data are scientifically legitimate and unambiguous, and
- it is easy to track lands as they go from one land-use category to another.

Irrespective of the scale of analysis, margins of error must be considered. Margins of error are presented for all NRI estimates. ■

- Between 1997 and 2001, about 23 million acres of cropland were converted to other uses, while nearly 17 million acres were converted to cropland uses. Most of these shifts occurred between cropland and pastureland and CRP land.
- Some 7 million acres of forest land were converted to other uses between 1997 and 2001, while about the same amount (7 million acres) was converted to forest land from other uses. Most of these shifts occurred between forest land and developed land and pastureland.

### Importance to the Nation

Land use is dynamic, with annual shifts in and out of different uses. Examining net change in land use reveals general trends, but masks the real extent of land use change over time. In agriculture there are frequent shifts in the use of land among cropland, pastureland, rangeland, and forest land. Each time land changes use it may affect erosion potential, contiguity of habitat, or hydrologic features of the landscape.

Cropland, pastureland, rangeland, and forest land comprise the majority of the Nation's land resources and thus:

- The condition of these lands influence directly or indirectly the environment enjoyed by the Nation.
- Meeting the Nation's objectives for natural resources and environmental quality will depend on how these lands are used and conserved.

### More Information

For more information about the NRI, visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI/>

See the 2001 Annual NRI Glossary for definitions of key terms:  
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/land/nri01/glossary.html>

To obtain State and local 1997 NRI data, contact your NRI coordinator. Links to State NRI websites and contact information can be found at:  
[http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI/1997/obtain\\_data.html](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI/1997/obtain_data.html)

Send comments and questions to [nri@nhq.nrcs.usda.gov](mailto:nri@nhq.nrcs.usda.gov)

## Total Surface Area by Land Use and Year in Millions of Acres, with Margins of Error

Year	Cropland	CRP Land	Pastureland	Rangeland	Forest Land	Other Rural Land	Developed Land	Water Areas	Federal Land
1982	420.4 ± 2.0	0 *	131.4 ± 1.3	414.5 ± 4.3	402.6 ± 2.3	48.3 ± 1.3	72.8 ± 0.7	48.6	399.1
1987	406.2 ± 2.0	13.8	127.2 ± 1.2	409.3 ± 4.3	404.4 ± 2.3	48.6 ± 1.3	79.0 ± 0.8	49.8	399.4
1992	381.6 ± 2.0	34.0	125.4 ± 1.2	405.9 ± 4.3	403.6 ± 2.3	49.8 ± 1.3	86.5 ± 0.8	49.4	401.5
1997	376.4 ± 2.0	32.7	119.5 ± 1.2	404.9 ± 4.3	404.7 ± 2.3	50.3 ± 1.3	97.6 ± 0.9	49.9	401.7
2001	369.6 ± 2.3	31.8	116.9 ± 1.7	404.7 ± 4.4	404.9 ± 2.5	51.4 ± 1.5	106.3 ± 1.1	50.3	401.8

\* CRP was not implemented until 1985.

Total surface area of the contiguous United States is 1,937.7 million acres

## Prime Farmland by Land Use and Year in Millions of Acres, with Margins of Error

Year	Cropland	Pastureland	Forest Land	All Other Land Uses	Total
1982	231.5 ± 3.4	37.7 ± 1.4	46.9 ± 1.7	26.0 ± 1.3	342.1 ± 4.0
1987	226.8 ± 3.4	37.1 ± 1.4	47.2 ± 1.7	28.7 ± 1.3	339.8 ± 4.0
1992	217.0 ± 3.3	37.2 ± 1.4	47.6 ± 1.7	34.7 ± 1.3	336.5 ± 4.0
1997	213.5 ± 3.3	35.4 ± 1.4	48.8 ± 1.7	34.9 ± 1.3	332.6 ± 4.0
2001	209.4 ± 3.3	35.1 ± 1.4	50.0 ± 1.7	35.1 ± 1.3	329.6 ± 4.0

## Cultivated and Noncultivated Cropland by Year in Millions of Acres, with Margins of Error

Year	Cultivated Cropland	Noncultivated Cropland	Total Cropland
1982	376.0 ± 1.9	44.4 ± 0.8	420.4 ± 2.0
1987	362.8 ± 1.9	43.4 ± 0.8	406.2 ± 2.0
1992	334.2 ± 1.9	47.4 ± 0.8	381.6 ± 2.0
1997	326.4 ± 1.8	50.0 ± 0.9	376.4 ± 2.0
2001	315.0 ± 1.8	54.6 ± 1.0	369.6 ± 2.3

## Nonfederal Grazing Land by Year in Millions of Acres, with Margins of Error

Year	Pastureland	Rangeland	Grazed Forest Land	Total Grazing Land
<b>1982</b>	131.4 ± 1.3	414.5 ± 4.3	65.1 ± 1.7	611.0 ± 4.6
<b>1987</b>	127.2 ± 1.2	409.3 ± 4.3	62.7 ± 1.7	599.2 ± 4.6
<b>1992</b>	125.4 ± 1.2	405.9 ± 4.3	61.4 ± 1.7	592.7 ± 4.6
<b>1997</b>	119.5 ± 1.2	404.9 ± 4.3	58.2 ± 1.8	582.6 ± 4.6
<b>2001</b>	116.9 ± 1.7	404.7 ± 4.4	55.7 ± 1.9	577.3 ± 4.8

## Gains and Losses in Cropland Between 1997 and 2001 in Millions of Acres, with Margins of Error

Cover/Use	Gains	Cover/Use	Losses
<b>Pastureland</b>	8.3 ± 0.6	<b>Pastureland</b>	10.1 ± 0.7
<b>CRP Land</b>	5.8 ± 0.5	<b>CRP Land</b>	7.5 ± 1.0
<b>All Other Land Uses</b>	2.5 ± 0.5	<b>Developed Land</b>	1.8 ± 0.2
<b>Total</b>	16.6 ± 0.8	<b>All Other Land Uses</b>	3.9 ± 0.4
		<b>Total</b>	23.3 ± 0.9

## Gains and Losses in Forest Land Between 1997 and 2001 in Millions of Acres, with Margins of Error

Cover/Use	Gains	Cover/Use	Losses
<b>Pastureland</b>	3.9 ± 0.4	<b>Developed Land</b>	4.1 ± 0.3
<b>Cropland</b>	1.2 ± 0.2	<b>Pastureland</b>	1.2 ± 0.2
<b>All Other Land Uses</b>	2.3 ± 0.4	<b>All Other Land Uses</b>	1.9 ± 0.2
<b>Total</b>	7.4 ± 0.6	<b>Total</b>	7.2 ± 0.5

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